DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 384 868 CS 012 221

AUTHOR Tomlinson, Louise M.

TITLE The National Reading Research Center: Agenda Related to Issues of Diverse Learners.

PUB DATE May 94

NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (39th, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 8-13, 1994).

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; Professional Development; Program Descriptions; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; Teacher Education

IDENTIFIERS *Diversity (Student); Educational Issues; *National Reading Research Center

ABSTRACT

The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) advocates education through research that addresses the unacceptably low reading achievement of American students and the lack of equity in the achievement of mainstream and minority populations. The NRRC acknowledges four pervasive problems that will sharpen the focus of the center's work: too many Americans lack essential reading abilities; ethnic and racial inequalities persist in schooling; the nature of current reading instruction and understanding has not had widespread impact; and reading research remains decontextualized and unaffected by real world constraints. The NRRC has initiated four strands of research: (1) instruction (investigating comprehension and cognitive strategies, literature and early reading, and social contexts of instruction); (2) learning (investigating learning subject matter from text, emergent literacy and language development, and motivation for reading); (3) assessment (investigating literacy portfolio assessment); and (4) teacher development (investigating the development of a summer course based on Foxfire principles). The NRRC has entered into an agreement with Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) to conduct studies and evaluations of Running Start. In 1993, the NRRC held a state-of-the-art conference on the theme of "Developing Engaged Readers in School and Home Communities." As the work of the center continues, research projects and other related activities will be subsumed under a new set of category strands: reading engagement and conceptual domains, early literacy, school research consortium, literacy professionals' ways of knowing, and home/school relations. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

The National Reading Research Center: Agenda Related to Issues of Diverse Learners

ED 384 868

Louise M. Tomlinson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Reading
and
Principal Investigator
National Reading Research Center
University of Georgia
706-542-0468
706-542-3674

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
L Tomlinson
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS012221

Presented for a Symposium of Nationl Research Centers, International Reading Association Convention, Toronto, 199[illegible]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The National Reading Research Center: Agenda Related to Issues of Diverse Learners

Mission

The National Reading Research Center (NRRC) which is headed by a consortium of faculty from The University of Georgia and The University of Maryland aim to advance education through research that addresses the unacceptably low reading achievement of American students and the lack of equity in the achievement of mainstream and minority populations. The center research is primarily guided by the conceptual framework of an engagement perspective. The engagement perspective is recognized as particularly relevant for ethnic and racial groups that are typically characterized by low reading achievement. Within this framework, the center investigators will pursue research that is school-based, teacher relevant, and theoretically driven. The overall goal of the center's research is to discover new ways to develop highly motivated, self-determined readers who will construct some ways of learning for themselves.

Definition of Diverse Learners

The NRRC defines diverse learners or students with diverse learning and curricular needs as any of the following:

- students who have not achieved the minimum level of literacy for their age or developmental stage
- students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds who are often victims of inequalities in schooling

- students who may be subject to the limited scope of instruction characteristic of basal reader programs, ability-level groups, workbooks, traditional textbooks and annual standardized tests
- students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and socio-cultural experiences ranging from narrow and limited to broad and varied exposures and who are, therefore, influenced by socio-cultural environments that either support or impede their cognitive processes and motivation to learn to read to varying degrees, and
- students who come from a variety of backgrounds in terms of social, cognitive and language bridges between home and school.

Specific Problems Addressed

The NRRC acknowledges four pervasive problems that will sharpen the focus of the center's work. First, too many Americans lack essential reading abilities. Second, there is a persistent presence of ethnic and racial inequalities in schooling in the United States. Third, the nature of current reading instruction and understanding of reading pedagogy has not had a widespread impact on classroom practice because research has not spoken to teachers and policy makers and has failed to account for the complexity of life in classrooms and schools. Fourth, there is a prevalence of decontextualized reading research that remains unaffected by real world constraints.

Definition of Effective or High Quality Tools

The NRRC defines "effective" or high quality tools as instructional materials and activities that stimulate the learner's engagement by:

- placing an emphasis on reading authentic literature
- integrating meaningful reading and writing activities
- promoting the development of meaning through social interaction
- challenging learners to assimilate new ideas, form new interpretations, or construct new concepts from print
- promoting self-esteem
- encouraging innovative social participation patterns that foster improved literary interpretation skills, higher order thinking during content area reading, and sustained motivation for sharing books
- implementing literature-based curricula for first and second grade learners that is particularly designed for students placed at high-risk for reading failure, and
- helping teachers to convey decoding, contextual analysis, prediction, self-questioning, clarification, monitoring, visualization, summarization, and interpretive strategies.

Research Strands and Projects

The specific problems of diverse learners or students with diverse learning and curricular needs that are acknowledged in

the state of the art have been initiated through four strands of research which are as follows: **instruction**, **learning**, **assessment**, and **teacher development**.

Under the **instruction strand**, Michelle Commeyras and Georgiana Sumner will study **comprehension and cognitive strategies** in an investigation entitled "Reading Instruction That Promotes Critical Thinking." Commeyras will examine developing students' critical thinking in conjunction with reading in Sumner's second grade classroom which consists of approximately 50 percent African Americans, an East Indian and an Asian student, and the rest European American students. In addition, some multicultural literature will be used.

Also under instruction, Lee Galda, Steve Stahl, Tony Pelligrini, and Betty Shockley will study **literature and early reading** in "An Examination of the Activities in a Whole Language Beginning Reading Program." Although this study does not directly address issues pertaining to diversity it speaks to diversity by virtue of the diverse backgrounds of the children participating who are African American and Caucasian and mostly from low SES. The focus is on their oral language as well as their progress in reading and writing. The literacy experiences that one class has at home will also be investigated.

Another instruction-oriented study will be conducted by James Hoffman and Sarah McCarthey who will address **literature and early reading** by examining "Beginning Reading Instruction:

Teachers and Students in Transition." The specific focus of this study will be to examine changes in literacy programs, literacy instruction and literacy learning that accompany the adoption of "literature based" basal reading programs in first grade classrooms. They will collect teacher and student data over a three year period. Teachers will be described in terms of their thinking about and understandings of effective rading instruction as they relate to longitudinal changes in features of instructional programs and surrounding contexts that appear to be influential. Students will be described in terms of class and individual student levels, test scores and the longitudinal development of six students in each classroom. Particular interest will be directed to the effects of these programs with students from economically disadvantaged communities.

Instruction-oriented research will also be pursued in terms of **literature and early reading** by Lesey Mandel Morrow who is in the process of studying "Collaborative Settings That Promote Independent Reading and Writing in Children from Diverse Backgrounds." Mandel is observing a literature based reading program in five second grade classrooms in an urban public school district of middle class to disadvantaged SES including students that are primarily of African American and Hispanic background--twenty-two percent of whom have been classified as "at risk" by state regulations.

To date, Mandel has found that the physical design of the

literacy centers, modelled behavior by teachers, and time for independent reading and writing periods were the critical contexts that enhanced social interactive processes that result in increased literacy activity and performance.

Finally, instruction-oriented research is addressed in terms of the **social contexts of instruction** by David Reinking, Tom Reeves, Mary Jo Brown, and Valerie Garfield in an examination of "Using Technology to Enhance Social Interaction for Reading and Writing." An important tool in these classrooms is technology that allows middle grade students to create multimedia book reviews. Although the study does not focus on a particularly diverse student population, the ultimate goal of the project is to determine whether this type of intervention increases the amount and diversity of independent reading, particularly for those who may do little reading on their own.

Under the **learning strand** as it relates to **learning subject matter from text**, Bruce K. Britton will investigate "Using Revision Techniques to Improve Content Area Textbooks." Britton focuses on four aspects of diversity or individual differences in learning abilities which are: metacognitive ability, working memory capacity, inference-making ability, and domain-specific prior knowledge. His hypothesis is that, since the primary tool in education is the textbook, improving the learnability of the text is a major way of improving the learning of diverse learners and that individual differences can be obviated by rewriting text

so that it requires less of the abilities and doubles the learning from text.

The learning strand will also examine **learning subject matter from text** through the "Investigation of the Effects of Instructional Interaction with Reading Materials Categorized by a Typology of Ethnic Identity" conducted by Louise M. Tomlinson (presenter). The study will categorize instructional materials to be used in primary and middle school classrooms according to the stages of Banks' Typology of Ethnic Identity and then determine each student and teacher's stage of ethnic identity by the application of Bank's typology in order to determine the following: whether the selective use of reading materials that are relevant to the stages of Banks' typology of ethnic identity foster increased interests, positive attitudes, or positive habits related to reading; whether the selective use of reading materials characterized by any of the stages of the typology change the psycho-social orientation of an individual initially identified as having an orientation more characteristic of any other stage in the typology; and whether the teachers find that the intentional use of reading materials classified by the typology enhances a student's sense of identity and his or her sense of multicultural awareness and/or capacity for interacting in a multicultural setting.

Another learning strand study will address **emergent literacy and language development**, through the work of Gene Brody and

Zolinda Stoneman who are investigating "Family Processes and the Development of Sibling Literacy in Rural Black Families." The note that illiteracy rates are particularly high among African American citizens in the state of Georgia where rural counties with primarily African American populations have the lowest adult education levels and they will illuminate the links between family processes and literacy competence for rural African American children.

Learning-oriented research will also address **emergent literacy and language development** by Betty Shockley, Barbara Michalove, and JoBeth Allen in a study of "Community and Engagement: Literacy Learning Among the Students Teachers Worry About." Their study will examine the connections between the families of first and second grade children and their teachers. The families are of low SES, sixty percent black and forty percent white, and the teachers are white. Families and teachers in the study will correspond regularly, two to four times each week. Home reading journals will be kept by children and Family Stories will be written by parents.

Finally, learning-oriented research will address **motivation for reading** in a longitudinal study by Penny Oldfather that will examine "Students' Perceptions of Their Own Reasons and Purposes for Being or Not Being Involved in Literacy Activities: A Longitudinal Qualitative Study of Student Motivation Toward Literacy." Embedded in this investigation is a focus on the

concept of what Oldfather calls the "honored voice," which honors diverse cultures, ideas, feelings, and multiple viewpoints or ways of knowing and, therefore, empowers students to "share the ownership of knowing."

Under the **assessment strand**, Sheila Valencia will investigate "Literacy Portfolio Assessment" in primary, intermediate, middle, and high school language arts classrooms. Although there are a limited number of minority and special needs children in the classrooms that Valencia is studying, she notes that, since portfolios are based in the classroom and rely on daily work, they are likely to be particularly sensitive to the needs and capabilities of diverse and special needs students regardless of their labels but in response to their culture and language.

Under the **teacher development strand**, Sally Hudson-Ross, Dana Fox, McWhorter, and Connie Zimmerman will involve twenty selected high and middle school teachers in a two-year program for the development of a summer course based on Foxfire principles of cooperative learning and student-based classrooms that they will implement and open to observation and training for student teachers. The school sites will be located in a district with a diverse school population and efforts will be made to assure diversity of project teachers and student teachers.

The Center's Progress to Date in Other Areas of Potential Impact on Diversity

The NRRC has entered into an agreement with Reading is Fundamental (RIF) to conduct studies and evaluations of one of the new RIF programs, Running Start. Linda Gambrell of UMD will investigate how Running Start supports children's development of motivation for reading, comprehension, and amount of engagement in reading and listening activity. The program will provide books for first-grade children and involve parents as well as teachers. Comparisons will be made between those who do and those who do not participate.

The NRRC has also arranged with the American Association for the Advancement of Science to publish children's reviews of trade books in science.

In 1993 the NRRC held a State-of-the-Art conference at the Georgia Center for continuing Education which addressed the theme of "Developing Engaged Readers in School and Home Communities." Presentations which addressed issues of diversity were as follows:

"Inner City Parents Buy Books Too" (Thompson, Mixon and Beasley - Clark-Atlanta University)

"Acquiring Literacy: Home and Classroom Connections in Pre-Kindergarten" (Harding - Harriet Tubman Elementary -NY)

"The Nuts and Bolts of Collecting In-Home Data on "Family Processes and Literacy Development" (Brody, McCoy, and McCrary - NRRC/UGA)

"The Home Literacy Environment of Baltimore City Pre-Schoolers" (Baker, Sonnenschein, Serpell - NRRC/UMD/Baltimore County)

"Engaging Students from Ethnic, Language Minority, and Special Populations in Literacy Learning" (Baker - NRRC/UMD, Thompson - Clark Atlanta U, Pressley - NRRC/UMD, Simmons - NCITE/UOE)

"Literacy Experiences in an ESOL Classroom" Boxley - University City H.S. PA)

"A Teacher's Book Club: Multicultural Literature" (Lapp and Flood - San Diego State Univ.)

Many of the participants of the 1993 conference were also engaged in teacher-researcher collaborative sessions (small group) whose discussions were centered around the following questions:

1. What are all the things you (teachers) do to support children in becoming engaged readers? (List things you do, factors that are important, and responses of the students to these supports)
2. What are the barriers to developing engaged readers?
3. What should we do to overcome these barriers? What research do we need in the 90s to learn more about developing engaged readers?

Participants were asked to respond to all of the questions with respect to the following five topics:

- books, basals, textbooks and materials
- teaching and instructional strategies
- social patterns in the classroom
- home-school relations
- school organizational structures

Conclusion

Many of the National Reading Research Center's variouw research projects will explore the needs of diverse learners either directly or indirectly. The investigations will do this from perspectives of diversity in students' cultural backgrounds, their diversity in learning abilities, their diverse preferences of reading materials, their performances in different settings, or their performance in response to varied assessments. As the work of the center continues, research projects and other related activities will be subsumed under a new set of category strands. The five new strands are: **Reading Engagement and Conceptual Domains**, **Early Literacy**, **School Research Consortium**, **Literacy Professionals' Ways of Knowing**, and **Home/School Relations**.

The information gathered from these areas of investigation and from the ideas shared at conferences and colloquia sponsored by the National Reading Research Center should serve to illuminate the critical focus of improving the tools of education for diverse learners in the variety of ways that have been discussed. Much of this research is currently in progress and will be published in several sources and formats for

dissemination in the near future.